

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SCCT-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 FBIE-00 SY-05 /063 W
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R 111611Z SEP 75

FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2658

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 6119

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, ASEC, AR

SUBJECT: MILITARY VS SUBVERSION VS DAMASCO

REF: BA 5781

1. SUMMARY. UNDER MILITARY PRESSURE, GOA HAS OUTLAWED MONTONEROS. MILITARY IS PUSHING FOR OTHER MEASURES TO STRENGTHEN GOVERNMENT'S HAND AGAINST TERRORISTS, AND MAY ITSELF BE MOVING TOWARD GREATER PARTICIPATION. END SUMMARY.

2. THE GOA, SEPTEMBER 8, DECLARED THE MONTONEROS AN ILLEGAL ORGANIZATION. THE MONTONEROS, ONCE A POLITICALLY ACTIVE SECTOR OF THE PERONIST PARTY, REMOVED THEMSELVES FROM IT OVER A YEAR AGO BECAUSE OF THE CONSERVATIVE TURN PERONISM HAD TAKEN AFTER PERON'S DEATH. FROM THE TIME THEY WENT UNDERGROUND, THE MONTONEROS BECAME THE LARGEST TERRORIST ORGANIZATION IN ARGENTINA. THE GOA'S OUTLAWING OF THE MONTONEROS, LONG OVERDUE GIVEN THEIR TERRORIST ACTIVITIES, WAS IN ITSELF NO SURPRISE. THE SIGNIFICANCE IS THAT INTERIOR MINISTER DAMASCO, WHO HOPED TO APPEAL TO LEFTIST PERONISTS IN ORDER TO EXPAND HIS VERY NARROW POLITICAL BASE, HAD WORKED TO AVOID THIS STEP. HOWEVER, DAMASCO'S POWER, WHICH IS DERIVED FROM MRS. PERON, HAS DECLINED RAPIDLY SINCE SHE LOST HER RECENT CONTEST WITH THE MILITARY (SEE REFTEL) AND EVIDENCE INDICATES DAMASCO WAS FORCED BY NEW ARMY COMMANDER VIDELA TO DECLARE THE MONTONEROS OUTLAWS.
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3. LEGAT HAS OBTAINED INFORMATION THAT, DURING WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 1, DAMASCO REJECTED RECOMMENDATION BY DIRECTOR OF FEDERAL SECURITY THAT RESPONSIBILITY FOR MONTONERO AFFAIRS BE TRANSFERRED FROM A MONITORING DEPARTMENT IN FEDERAL POLICE OF ARGENTINA TO DEPARTMENT THAT SPECIALIZES IN ILLEGAL GUERRILLA ACTIVITIES--INTELLIGENCE AND REPRESSION. DURING THIS SAME PERIOD THE MILITARY CINCS, EXECUTIVE BRANCH, LEGISLATORS AND OTHER HIGH MILITARY AND CIVILIAN AUTHORITIES BEGAN A SERIES OF JOINT AND SEPARATE MEETINGS ON ANTISUBVERSION. DAMASCO'S EFFORTS TO TONE DOWN THE MILITARY PITCH WERE IN EVIDENCE AT THE SEPTEMBER 4 MEETING. ACCORDING TO PRESS ACCOUNTS, HE SAID THE ANTISUBVERSION FIGHT DEMANDED POLITICAL ACTION AND THAT THE RELAXED ATMOSPHERE FOR SUCH TALKS WITH VARIOUS GROUPS DID NOT YET EXIST BUT THAT THE GOVERNMENT WAS DETERMINED TO HAVE THEM. THIS DELAYING TACTIC WAS COUPLED WITH HIS SUGGESTION THAT STUDY BE MADE ON POSSIBILITY OF FREEING DETAINEES HELD UNDER EXECUTIVE ORDER. THIS WENT OVER BADLY WITH MILITARY, AS INDEED DID DAMASCO'S POLITICAL MANEUVERING IN GENERAL. DAMASCO'S LOSS IN THIS VOLLEY, PLUS HIS DEFEAT IN THE RECENT BATTLE BETWEEN MRS. PERON AND THE MILITARY, HAVE PLACED HIM IN A VERY WEAK POSITION AND HIS CHANCES FOR REMAINING IN OFFICE DO NOT APPEAR VERY BRIGHT.

4. THE MILITARY HAS MOVED RAPIDLY TO PUSH POSITIVE ACTION PROGRAMS AGAINST SUBVERSION ON VARIOUS FRONTS. IN PUBLICLY PUSHING FOR A MORE ACTIVE MILITARY ROLE IN COUNTERTERRORIST ACTIVITIES, THE INSTITUTIONAL PRESTIGE OF THE SERVICES WILL BE ENHANCED OR TARNISHED BY THE RESULTS THEY OBTAIN.

5. THE MILITARY IS PRESSING HARD FOR ADDITIONAL MEASURES TO DEAL WITH SUBVERSION. THE CREATION OF A NATIONAL SECURITY COORDINATING COMMITTEE SEEMS TO BE THE NEXT ITEM ON THE MILITARY LIST. THE COMMITTEE WOULD COORDINATE ALL ACTIVITIES IN THE ANTISUBVERSION WAR BUT ALSO PROBABLY COMMAND SOME OPERATIONS. THE MILITARY WANTS THE COMMITTEE HEADQUARTERED IN THE DEFENSE MINISTRY, AND PROBABLY FUNCTION AS A MISSION OF THE JOINT STAFF.

6. THE CONGRESS WILL BE ASKED TO PRODUCE MORE EFFECTIVE LAWS TO DEAL WITH THE TERRORISTS. ARMED FORCES AUTHORITIES ARE CONFIDENTIAL

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ALSO ASKING FOR THE CREATION OF A MILITARY TRIBUNAL TO TRY ALL SUBVERSIVE CASES. JUSTICE MINISTRY OFFICIALS ARE REVIEWING POSSIBLE CHANGES IN THE PENAL CODE OF ARGENTINA TO MAKE IT MORE RESPONSIVE TO THE TERRORIST PROBLEM. DAO REPORTS THAT ALMOST ALL THE NEW COMMANDERS AND SECONDS IN COMMAND OF THE VARIOUS ARMY CORPS, RESULTING FROM CHANGES AFTER THE CRISIS (REFTEL), ARE HARDLINERS WITH REGARD TO PROFESSIONALISM AND TERRORISM. IF ADEQUATE INSTITUTIONAL CHANGES ARE MADE BY THE

OTHER BRANCHES OF GOVERNMENT, AN INTENSIVE CRACKDOWN SEEMS IN
THE OFFING AGAINST THE TERRORISTS.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PARAMILITARY FORCES, NATIONAL SECURITY, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 11 SEP 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975BUENOS06119
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750315-0658
From: BUENOS AIRES
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750959/aaaacaaz.tel
Line Count: 118
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 BUENOS AIRES 5781
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 04 SEP 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <04 SEP 2003 by SmithRJ>; APPROVED <01 DEC 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MILITARY VS SUBVERSION VS DAMASCO
TAGS: PINT, PINS, ASEC, MILI, AR, MONTONEROS
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006